



260 SW Madison Ave. Ste 106 | Corvallis, OR 97333 | www.tilth.org | PH 503.378.0690 | FX 541.753.4924 | organic@tilth.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Publication Offers Guidance for Conservation Buffers on Organic Farms

Contact: Sarah Brown, Program Manager, Oregon Tilth, 503-779-6557, Sarah.Brown@por.usda.gov

November 6, 2013—A newly released publication, [Conservation Buffers in Organic Systems: Western State Implementation Guide](#), provides guidance on installing buffers in organic production systems to meet the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulations. Part of a five-guide series, this resource will enable the Federal Environmental Quality Incentives (EQIP) Program, especially the EQIP Organic Initiative, to be more responsive to and valuable for organic farmers.

Conservation buffers are generally strips of vegetation placed in the landscape to influence ecological processes and provide a variety of services. In the context of organically managed systems, buffer zones are required under NOP rules if there is a risk of contamination, via drift or flow, of substances not allowed under organic regulations such as an organic field bordering a conventional field on which prohibited substances are being used.

“When buffers are required on organic farms, they offer a great opportunity to simultaneously support other conservation practices.” Sarah Brown, Organic Conservation Program Manager at Oregon Tilth adds that “buffers can benefit the operation by creating habitat for beneficial organisms such as pollinators, birds, and predators of crop pests.”

Buffers may also provide a barrier against weed seed migration, prevent wind damage to crops and protect water quality. In doing so, buffers may simultaneously meet other NOP regulations which require that organic operations maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation.

The guide provides conservation planners with more information on relevant NOP regulations; discusses a variety of design considerations, including site selection and plant selection. The document stresses the importance of site preparation and covers three weed-management options: stale seedbed, smother cropping and solarization. Short and long-term maintenance considerations are examined, followed by a list of resources such as seed suppliers and plant lists.

Together with the other four new resources, this guide will help to address the insufficient technical resources for conservation plan development and limited staff understanding of organic production practices and certification regulations at USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) which administers EQIP. EQIP provides financial assistance and technical support to producers for conservation practices such as buffers, cover crops and pest management. The new guides may also be useful to other agricultural professionals such as those with Cooperative Extension and producers who are interested in implementing these conservation practices.

This project is the result of a partnership between Oregon Tilth’s Organic Conservation Program, the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), the Xerces Society and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); it is funded by a grant from Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (WSARE).

The Organic Conservation Program works to institutionalize knowledge and skills for supporting organic agriculture within the nation’s conservation system and to increase financial and technical resources needed by organic farmers for productive, ecologically healthy farms. To find out more visit: <http://tilth.org/education-research/organic-conservation-program>